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## THE COUNTY EMPLOYEE

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### I. *The Inefficiency of the Employee*

The story is told in a certain county in New Jersey that one of its elective county officials went to the county board of chosen freeholders with a request for four additional clerks. Only two were needed, but he figured the requisition would be cut down and he might consequently get the number wanted. Now this county official and the board were of opposite political faiths, and a representative of the board came to him and said, so the story goes, "You don't need four new men in your office, you need eight." The official saw the point at once and an appropriation was passed allowing for the appointment of four good republicans and four loyal democrats. So eight men were given jobs when only two were required.

When one has occasion to examine the payroll of a county office and to compare the number of men employed with the work to be done the foregoing story is a very plausible explanation of the condition which will frequently be found to prevail. There has been so little attention paid to county government in the past, the number of citizens who came in contact with its offices so few, and the public supervision of these offices so inadequate that practically any county department, taken at random, will show evidences of an excessive number of employees. If you will read the report of almost any investigation of a county department you will find a list entitled "Positions recommended for abolishment."

The elective county officials in New Jersey, the county clerk, register, sheriff and surrogate, formerly received no salaries, but were paid by fees out of which they met the expenses of their offices—and usually retired wealthy. Now these officials are on a salary basis. Hudson<sup>1</sup> and Essex are the two largest counties in New Jersey; they are adjacent and have similar population and wealth.

<sup>1</sup> Hudson county has the largest population and the smallest area of any in New Jersey. It contains Jersey City, Hoboken, Bayonne and ten other municipalities, and its county government costs a trifle under \$3,000,000 a year.

In Essex the four elective offices return the county an annual profit of about \$35,000, while in Hudson the net cost to the county of the register's office alone is \$55,000.

In Hudson county we found positions of similar work and responsibility receiving widely varying rates of compensation. The efficient and industrious employee should welcome the installation of time sheets and job or work records so that promotions and salary increases could be fairly based on ability to perform work, and not on favoritism. It would be advantageous if we could have fewer, but more efficient, employees, who could then receive higher compensation in return for their increased efficiency.

Last fall a study was made of the payrolls and the working force of each county department in Hudson county, and a report was published under the title "Comparisons of Appropriations and Salaries," in which it was shown that there has grown up a system of compensation which resulted in higher payrolls and a larger number of employees than is required in other counties, where an approximately equal volume of work is to be performed. To make the facts more impressive than the mere citing of figures would allow, the graphic method was used to depict the results of the study. In this examination it was found that, as a rule, the heads of departments received salaries out of all proportion to the services rendered, and that, while some subordinates were underpaid, many received higher compensation than is given men doing similar work in other counties. Hudson county is probably exceptional in this, however, as in most county departments the subordinates are poorly paid. Compensation of public employees is too frequently based on "pull," rather than on work performed. The human element is now recognized as a fundamental factor by efficiency experts. It seems strange that we have paid so little attention to the selection and training of competent employees when ninety per cent of the expenditures of some of our county departments goes into salaries.

County officials are usually nominated by party machines and elected by voters who have practically no knowledge of the requirements or functions of the offices to be filled. The numerous elective heads of our county departments are so engaged in keeping their political fences intact that the guarding of the public's fences is left to subordinates. The deputy or chief clerk of these county departments, particularly in the larger counties, is frequently the man who

actually runs the office. Generally the deputy is an efficient and experienced man who has spent many years in the position. The subordinates are usually selected without the requirement of any special qualifications and regardless of the peculiar needs of the position to be filled. Even under civil service little attention is paid to aptitude and personal habits, and practically no effort is made to interest desirable candidates. The essential qualifications of a prospective employee for any business, private or public, is that he should have aptitude for the work of that position; training and experience are of secondary importance.

The plan of having a business manager for a county to serve under a small board has been advanced and merits most careful consideration. It has many advantages, chief among which is that the manager would be able to treat the force of county employees in an original and businesslike manner. Such an experiment should be beneficial to the employee and to the public at large.

## II. *To Obtain Maximum Efficiency from the Employee*

1. The department or office must be correctly planned and efficiently organized, so as to get the work done accurately and promptly, and with as little red tape as possible. This requires a precise statement of the work or functions to be performed, and the man or men responsible for each separate function. This is usually accomplished by means of a chart. If one will try to chart the working force of almost any department in a good sized county the need for a reorganization of the departments will be quickly realized. It will be apparent that there is inequality in the amount of work expected of the employees, that there is confusion as to responsibility for the performance of certain duties and that much energy is being misapplied or wasted.

2. Employees must be selected scientifically—with a view to the positions to be filled. Men are appointed without proper investigation of their physical, mental or moral qualities. There are heads of departments with appointive power who do not know that it is possible by scientific character analysis to predict whether a given man can adequately meet the duties of a given position.

3. Having selected men who have aptitude for the various positions, they must be trained in the best methods, and then team play must be secured. The right men, correctly placed, need to have instilled in them a spirit of unity.

4. The next step is to keep job sheets, showing the quantity and quality of each man's work, on which records, increased pay and promotions can be impartially determined.

5. The avenue to promotion should be kept open as a reward for merit and as an incitement to the ambitious to advance in ability and efficiency.

### III. *The Necessity for Improvement in Efficiency*

Many of our counties and municipalities are already so heavily bonded that future generations will be embarrassed to raise funds for necessary improvements. So we must recognize the necessity for instituting scientific and efficient methods of administration. The conduct of a city or county department can be and must be as economical as that of a private corporation. The employee should welcome the movement for the installation of approved business methods, as it will revert to his benefit as well as to the public's.

It is highly desirable that the public should take a new attitude toward its officials and employees. Many of these are faithful men who take a great pride in their work and who strive to protect the public interest, with little recognition from citizens. Citizen bodies should recognize faithful and efficient services, and the public should reserve the highest places in its esteem for upright and successful officials. Publicity has its function of illuminating the good as well as the bad. Give recognition and high public esteem to the deserving, and the public service will attract and hold the best of our young men.

Why have our public schools never attempted to train the young for the public service? Our libraries and schools should cooperate not only in interesting and informing citizens about matters of county and city government, but also in turning the attention of those seeking a vocation to the opportunities of the public service, and to preparing them to enter it.